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DE RUEHAK #0745/01 1461337
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 261337Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9730
INFO RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0203
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 5777
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RHMFIS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE

UNCLAS ANKARA 000745

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL CASEY

Welcome

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Coming in the wake of hugely successful trips of President Obama and Secretary Clinton, your visit will be seen as a further sign that Washington views Turkey as an important strategic partner. Your visit is an opportunity to reinforce the importance of strong U.S.-Turkey relations and discuss several hot topics such as Turkey's role in the facilitation of talks between Israel/Syria and Pakistan/Afghanistan, as well as its own rapprochement with Armenia. Turkey has worked hard under PM Erdogan to play a more active role in the region and to improve relations with its neighbors. As a result, Turkish facilitation featured prominently in recent efforts to reduce regional tensions and Ankara won a 2009-2011 non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Turkey has consistently demonstrated strong security cooperation as a key U.S. ally and the only NATO member bordering Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Turkey has contributed forces to all NATO operations, and currently has approximately 750 troops serving in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan -- which it commanded twice -- and 400 troops in Kosovo (KFOR). The cargo hub in Incirlik Air Base supports operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; 76 percent of air cargo entering Iraq transits Incirlik.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Having secured a majority in March 29 nationwide municipal elections, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is under increasing pressure from an economy that has begun to show weakening in response to the global economic slowdown, including a marked up-tick in unemployment and drop-off in exports. Addressing these problems, Erdogan reshuffled his cabinet earlier this month, reinforcing his economic team and naming his senior foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoglu as the new Foreign Minister.

Middle East

[¶4.](#) (SBU) Under AKP leadership, Turkey has endeavored to play a constructive role in the Middle East, including support for Annapolis, the Lebanese presidential elections, and indirect Israel-Syria talks. During the Gaza crisis, PM Erdogan traveled to Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt in an attempt to help coalesce a consolidated Arab position. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza struck a chord with Turks across the political spectrum, and criticism of Israeli actions was fierce and vocal. Some Turks, however, expressed concern over Erdogan's close identification of Turkish interests with Hamas. A February 6-7 visit to Ankara by Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas and concerted effort by Turkish

officials has limited damage to the Turkey-Israel relationship. GOT officials continue to work to help achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation and to repair bilateral ties with Tel Aviv.

¶5. (SBU) The GOT, meanwhile, is eager to resume indirect Israel-Syria talks. The Turkish government facilitated four rounds of indirect talks in Istanbul between the Syrian and Israeli delegations aimed at laying the ground work for future direct negotiations. A fifth unofficial session occurred in December during PM Olmert's Ankara visit when Erdogan placed several calls to Asad. At a joint press conference in Syria earlier this month, President Gul and Asad called for the indirect talks to resume and the GOI to name a negotiator.

Armenia

¶6. (SBU) The USG has worked hard to encourage candid discussion in Turkey of the tragedy suffered by ethnic Armenians during World War I. The Turkish and Armenian governments have made impressive progress in their negotiations on normalizing bilateral relations and opening the border. Turkey's public would react strongly to a Congressional resolution labeling this tragedy a "genocide," which would set back the efforts of those in Turkey calling for comprehensive examination of the history and normalized Turkish-Armenian relations. We are urging the GOT to move forward to normalize relations with Armenia as soon as possible. In its efforts to reach out to Yerevan, Ankara has also encouraged Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh along the parameters of the OSCE Minsk Group "Basic Principles."

Afghanistan

¶7. (SBU) Turkey has consistently supported Coalition efforts in Afghanistan. The GOT has pledged over USD 200 million in humanitarian assistance, mostly for the reconstruction and operation of schools and hospitals. Despite its significant military and public contributions, Turkey maintains restrictive caveats on the use of its ISAF forces which limit their ability to be deployed outside the Kabul area in support of the ISAF commander. We are asking Turkey and other allies to contribute additional resources to ISAF, including helicopters, troops, and training teams. Turkey has also used its historically close relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan to actively promote dialogue and cooperation, hosting two trilateral summits, the most recent in Ankara in April 2009 with the participation of Presidents Karzai and Zadari, their foreign ministers, and chiefs of military staff.

EU Accession

¶8. (SBU) Turkey formally became a candidate state for the European Union in 2004, but has aspired to membership much longer. Technical harmonization with EU regulations on many subjects has continued, even through parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 contributed to the GOT's inability to enact reforms on several high-level political issues. Attempts by the opposition to close down the AKP and ban its leaders from politics dominated much of 2008 and provincial and municipal elections in 2009 hindered reforms linked to Turkey's long-term aspirations for EU membership. The Turkish public is growing increasingly leery of the EU venture, largely in reaction to Euro-skepticism of Turkey as a candidate country. Nevertheless, the GOT pushed forward with some reforms in the second half of 2008, most notably on Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code which had earlier allowed prosecutors to bring cases against anyone found to have "insulted Turkishness." Erdogan named a new Minister for EU Accession in January of this year and indicated the government plans to move forward with constitutional and other legislative reforms in 2009. A settlement on Cyprus this year will be key to keeping Turkey's accession talks on track.

PKK

¶9. (SBU) For over 20 years, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has conducted a terrorist campaign that has resulted in the deaths of more than 37,000 Turks and terrorists. Since the end of its self-imposed five-year cease-fire in 2004, the PKK launched attacks against Turkey from strongholds in northern Iraq, killing hundreds of Turkish civilians, military, and foreigners, including roughly 170 in 2007 alone. Following attacks in late 2007 that claimed over 100 dead, wounded, and captured, the Turkish Parliament authorized the GOT to launch cross-border operations against PKK camps in northern Iraq. After a November 2007 meeting with Erdogan, then-President Bush to provide Turkey with intelligence to support military action against the PKK in northern Iraq. As a result, the public mood toward the U.S. began a slow, but perceptible upswing, further boosted by the election of President Obama and his subsequent visit here, along with that of Secretary Clinton.

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